

A Look Back at CIA's Forerunner, the OSS

By Charles Howe

The American intelligence effort during World War II, as described here yesterday, was composed of a weird mixture of high society, assassination teams — and even pornography.

The efforts of the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, were chronicled by R. Harris Smith, a former CIA intelligence analyst.

Smith spoke at a press conference to announce the publication of his book, "OSS — The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency."

MIXTURE

Smith said the OSS, founded shortly before Pearl Harbor was bombed on Dec. 7, 1941, probably harbored the damndest combination of liberals and left and right wing radicals the world has ever seen.

The mission of the OSS, commanded by General William Joseph Donovan, was espionage, sabotage and subversion of hostile governments.

At one time, Smith said, Donovan had on his payroll such luminaries as William Bundy, Henry Ringling North of circus fame, Arthur Goldberg — later U.S. ambassador to the United Nations — and Dr. Ralph J. Bunche.

None of the above, Smith hastened to add, ever actually assassinated anyone.

Smith said he interviewed more than 200 former OSS operatives in researching the book and was given access to secret papers at the

Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

By no means a dedicated supporter of the CIA, Smith said that the seeds for this intelligence apparatus that fumbled the Bay of Pigs operation in Cuba were sown by the old OSS years ago.

During World War II, Smith said, members of the liberal intellectual community gladly signed on with the OSS.

Former operatives, Smith said, included Herbert Marcuse, political mentor of Angela Davis, and Ralph de Toledano, far-right columnist.

Even the gentle Julia Childs, who now has a cooking program on television, was enlisted as an intelligence records keeper in wartime. Chunking, Smith said.

Following World War II — after the OSS had engaged in everything from gun-running to demolitions work — the CIA simply began to do the same thing, Smith said.

VICTIMS

The problem, he said, was that some of the CIA's victims were yesterday's allies.

The remnants of the OSS were absorbed into the newly formed CIA in 1947 and not many liberals survived the political purges of the late Senator Joseph McCarthy in the years that followed, Smith said.

Indeed, it seems certain that the person who hatched a plot to drive Hitler mad during World War II could be found in the silent and maligned ranks of today's CIA.

As Smith told it, OSS psychiatrists had a scheme that

if Adolf Hitler, because of his bizarre mental makeup, caught sight of a single piece of pornography, the effect might well drive him crazy.

Armed with this intelligence, other agents spent thousands of dollars to corner the market on German pornography — literally tons of it.

The plan, as Smith recounts it, was to drop the dirty stuff on Hitler's headquarters and then, presumably, to wait for the war to end as soon as Hitler went into psychosis.

The plan was aborted, however, when the Army Air Forces colonel who was

to have dropped the smutty stuff heard about it.

"He cursed the OSS maniacs and swore he would not risk the life of a single airman for such a crazy operation," Smith said.

R. HARRIS SMITH
The author

Sec. 4.01.2 OSS - The
Secret History of
America's First
Central Intelligence
Agency

CIA 1.05 Donovan, William
CIA 4 - Cuba - Bay of
Pigs

P - de Toledano, Ralph
Hitler, Adolph